

TABLE PLACEMAT AND PROTECTIVE COVERING

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of the filing date of U.S. provisional application serial number 60/472,916 entitled "Table Placemat" which was filed on May 23, 2003 and which is 5 incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a table placemat.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Managing a small child is especially difficult when dining out in a restaurant. Typically, 10 in a restaurant, parents have to eat their food while simultaneously trying to feed their child. This can result in an unsatisfying experience for everyone involved.

High chairs that are typically used for seating a child, whether in a restaurant or elsewhere, are often unsanitary because of their repetitive use by different children during the day and the lack of attention paid to clean them thoroughly. Another problem is the mess created by 15 the leftover food crumbs, smears, and spills left behind when the family has finished dining.

These crumbs, smears and spills, consisting of foods and beverages dropped by the child, may fall to the floor through the naturally existing gap between a table and a high chair, or may fall on the seat, arms and back of a high chair. Additionally, children may drag plates, bowls and the like from tables, allowing them to fall to the floor, resulting in spilled food and possible broken 20 dishware.

Spilled food and beverages may also damage table tops and table linens. Similarly, cutlery and dishware struck on or dragged across table tops may also damage table tops or table

linens. Children seated at tables may be especially prone to behaviors which lead to such damage.

To be practical for modern-day parents, any device which seeks to lessen or eliminate the foregoing issues must be portable and easy to use. Parents traveling with one or more children, 5 particularly into crowded restaurants and similar spaces, often are not able to carry cumbersome or heavy accoutrements. Likewise, these parents are ill-equipped to set-up complicated or unwieldy mechanical devices.

Finally, in order to maintain a sanitary condition, a device devised to prevent or eliminate spills, dropped implements, table-top damage, and so on must be easily washable or disposable.

10 Devices which are incapable of being easily and adequately washed will quickly become unsanitary, thus presenting a potentially unhealthy condition for the child and defeating an important goal of the device.

Several proposed solutions to the foregoing problems have been suggested in the past; however, no suggestion has provided a suitable solution.

15 One class of proposed solution may be found in U.S. Patent Nos. 6,631,950, 6,428,098, 6,237,998 and other similar patents. Each of these patents discloses a seat liner; that is, a covering for high chairs or other infant seats wherein the covering is placed on or about the high chair or other infant seat. None of these coverings provide any protection for an eating surface on a table, nor do any provide protection for the floor around the base of the high chair or other 20 infant seat. Additionally, several of these coverings are adapted to fit only a limited number of high chair designs, or in some instances, only a single high chair design. Additionally, these

devices must be fitted to a high chair or infant chair prior to placing an infant in the seat, and an infant must be removed from its seat prior to removing the device.

Still other proposed solutions are designed to prevent food and other items from dropping to the floor. Two examples of such devices are disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,848,834 and

5 4,659,143. Each of these devices is specifically adapted to operate with cantilever type infant chairs that attach directly to a table top. The two devices are secured to a table and catch falling items in a surface formed beneath the infant seat. These devices suffer from several significant limitations, including being of use with cantilever type seats only, cumbersome set-up, and poor portability. Furthermore, these devices do not protect table surfaces nor high chair surfaces such

10 as high chair arms.

As parents have become increasingly conscious of germ protection for their children, there has been an increase in demand for products that would make the experience of dining out more pleasurable for the parents and more sanitary for the babies.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

15 Accordingly, a placemat and protective covering is disclosed. The placemat and protective covering is intended to protect a baby from an unsanitary table and high chair, whether in a restaurant or elsewhere, and further to protect table surfaces, high chair surfaces and floors from food, drinks and other items which a child may drop. The placemat and protective covering includes a main placemat area (which acts as a main protective portion) which may be placed on

20 the table to provide a clean eating surface. The placemat and protective covering may be coupled to the side arms of a high chair or other child seat to provide a cover for the side arms to protect the baby. If desired, the placemat and protective covering may be coupled to the front arm of the

high chair or other child seat to provide a cover for the front arm to protect the baby. Thus, almost all surfaces of the high chair or other child seat and table with which the baby comes into contact during eating may be covered to provide a sanitary and safe surrounding for the baby. Likewise, the floor directly beneath and around the high chair or other child seat may be 5 protected. In an exemplary embodiment, the placemat also prevents the baby from pulling items, such as gum, that may be stuck to the bottom of the table.

In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a placemat and protective covering comprises a main placemat area, at least one flap extending from the main placement area and operable to releasably couple the main placement area with a chair, and at least one 10 coupling element operable to releasably couple the at least one flap with the chair.

In a preferred embodiment, a protective covering for use with a table top and child's chair having a front arm portion. The protective covering has a main protective portion and a front protective portion which is attached to the main protective portion and adapted to operatively attach to the front arm portion of the child's chair. The front protective portion is adapted to 15 extend from the table top to the child's chair.

The protective portion may include a bottom side for contacting the table top and a top side. The bottom side may have skid resistant portions for resisting skidding of the protective covering across the table top. The main protective portion may include a pocket formed therein. This pocket may be formed by cutting into the surface of the protective covering or by attaching 20 an additional piece of material to the top surface of the protective covering, among other methods.

In certain preferred embodiments, the front protective portion may include a coupling element for coupling the front protective portion to the front arm portion of the child's chair. The coupling elements may be selected from the group comprising: adhesive portions, hook-and-loop fabric (such as Velcro brand hook-and-loop fabric); mutually attracting magnetic portions; 5 ball-and-socket snaps; hook and loop fasteners; ribbon ties; and traditional button closures (that is, traditional button/button hole pairs).

In certain preferred embodiments, the child's chair further has two side arm portions and the protective covering has two side protective portions attached to and extending from the front protective portion. The side arm portions may be substantially orthogonal to the front protective 10 portion.

In these embodiments, each of the side protective portions may be adapted to operatively attach to (i.e., be maintained with) one of the side arm portions. Each of the side protective portions may include a coupling element for coupling the side protective portion to the side arm portions of the child's chair. The coupling elements may be selected from the group comprising: 15 adhesive portions, adhesive portions, hook-and-loop fabric; mutually attracting magnetic portions; ball-and-socket snaps; hook and loop fasteners; ribbon ties; and traditional button closures.

The main protective portion may include a bottom side for contacting the table top and a top side, the bottom side having skid resistant portions for resisting skidding of the protective 20 covering across the table top.

An alternative embodiment of the present invention includes a protective covering for use with a table top and child's chair having a front arm portion. The protective covering has a main

protective portion, an intermediate portion (that is, a portion interposed between the main protective portion and a front protective portion) extending from the main protective portion and a front protective portion extending from the pocket portion and adapted to operatively attach to (i.e., be maintained with) the front arm portion of the child's chair. In these embodiments, the 5 pocket discussed in the previous embodiments may be formed in the intermediate portion.

Similarly, the front and side protective portions may be as previously described except that these portions would extend from the intermediate portion, not the main protective portion.

These and other aspects of the subject invention will become more readily apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art from the following detailed description of the invention

10 taken in conjunction with the drawings described herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention, the objects and advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in connection with the accompanying drawings in which:

15 Figure 1 is a top plan view of a table placemat/protective covering;

Figure 2 is a bottom plan view of the table placemat/protective covering of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a perspective view of the table placemat/protective covering of Figure 1 coupled to a chair; and

20 Figure 4 is a top plan view of an alternative embodiment of a table placemat/protective covering.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS AND PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The preferred embodiment of the present invention and its advantages are best understood by referring to Figures 1 through 4 of the drawings, like numerals being used for like and corresponding parts of the various drawings. The terms “table placemat” and “protective covering” are used interchangeably herein.

Figure 1 is a top plan view of a table placemat 10, Figure 2 is a bottom plan view of table placemat 10 and Figure 3 is a perspective view of table placemat 18 coupled to a chair 12.

Placemat 10 comprises a top surface 11 (Figure 1) and a bottom surface 13 (Figure 2). Placemat 10 comprises a main placement area 14 which may be placed on a table 25 and could serve as an eating area. In the illustrated embodiment, main placement area 14 is rectangular. However, it could be of any shape. Placemat 10 also comprises at least one side flap 16 extending from a side of main placement area 14. In the illustrated embodiment, placemat 10 comprises two side flaps 16.

If desired, placemat 10 may also comprise a front flap 18 (Figure 1) extending between side flaps 16 from a side of main placement area 14. The front flap may be split in order to accept a vertical member or strap extending from the seat of the highchair to the front arm of the highchair. Preferably, side flaps 16 and front flap 18 extend from the same side of main placement area 14. Furthermore, preferably side flaps 16 are longer than front flap 18. As illustrated, side flaps 16 and front flap 18 form a U-shape with the opening of the U-shape facing away from main placement area 14. If desired, a pocket 20 may be provided in main placement area 14 on top surface 11 in proximity to side flaps 16. Preferably, pocket 20 extends along the width of main placement area 14. If desired, pocket 20 may extend only along a portion of the

width of main placemat area 14. Pocket 20 may be used to catch food or other items falling from table 25 (Figure 3).

Figure 4 is a top plan view of an alternative embodiment of the present invention.

Placemat 10 comprises a top surface 11 and a bottom surface, not shown. Placemat 10 comprises 5 a main placement area as shown and described in Figure 1. Placemat 10 also comprises intermediate portion 22 and at least one side flap 16 extending from the intermediate portion 22. In the illustrated embodiment, placemat 10 comprises two side flaps 16. Pocket 21, with opening 20, are formed in the intermediate portion 22.

Top surface 11 of placemat 10 may serve as an eating area on which the food of the child 10 may be placed. Top surface 11 of placemat 10 is preferably made of an easy to clean material, such as vinyl. Bottom surface 13 of placemat 10 preferably comprises or is made of skid resistant material, such as a tacky rubber-like material, to prevent slipping or skidding of placemat 10 from table 25. Preferably, the bottom surface of only area 14 is comprised or made 15 of skid resistant material, although if desired, the bottom surface of other portions of placemat 10 may be made of skid resistant material. Additionally, one or more suction cups may be provided on bottom surface 13 for coupling placemat 10 with the surface of table 25. If desired, an intermediate layer (not shown) may be provided between the top and bottom surfaces. The intermediate layer may be made of fabric or other material which includes an aesthetic print to make placemat 10 aesthetically pleasing. For example, the intermediate layer may display the 20 child's favorite cartoon characters or may be used to display messages or advertisements.

Side flaps 16 may be used to releasably couple placemat 10 to or around side arms 24 of chair 12 (Figure 3). Furthermore, side flaps 16 may be used to cover the side arms of chair 12 for

both sanitary and safety reasons. Side flaps 16 may be coupled around side arms 24 of chair 12 by one or more coupling elements 26 (Figure 2). Any suitable coupling element, such as hook and loop segments, metal brads, magnets, sticking pads, buttons, and other coupling elements now known or developed in the future, may be used. Although in the illustrated embodiment, 5 four coupling elements 26 are shown, two on each side flap 16, the invention is not so limited and if desired fewer or greater number of coupling elements may be used. Coupling elements 26 are preferably attached to bottom surface 13 of placemat 10. In an exemplary embodiment, a first part of one or more hook and loop segments comprising of two parts each is attached to one corner of one of the side flaps 16 while a second part of the hook and loop segments is attached 10 to another corner of the same side flap.

Front flap 18 may be used to releasably couple placemat 18 to or around a front arm of chair 12 (Figure 3). Furthermore, front flap 18 may be used to cover the front arm of chair 12 for both sanitary and safety reasons. Front flap 18 may be coupled around the front arm of chair 12 by one or more coupling elements 28 (Figure 2). Any suitable coupling element, such as hook 15 and loop segments, metal brads, magnets, sticking pads, buttons, and other coupling elements now known or developed in the future, may be used. Although in the illustrated embodiment, two coupling elements 28 are shown, the invention is not so limited and if desired fewer or greater number of coupling elements may be used. Coupling elements 28 are preferably attached to bottom surface 13 of placemat 10. In an exemplary embodiment, a first part of one or more 20 hook and loop segments comprising of two parts each is attached to one end of front flap 18 while a second part of the hook and loop segments is attached to another end of front flap 18.

In use, the child is placed on the seat of chair 12 (Figure 3). Main placement area 14 of placemat 10 is placed on table 25 in front of the child. Side flaps 16 are coupled to side arms 24 of chair 12 such that side flaps 16 substantially cover the surface of side arms 24. If desired, front flap 18 may be coupled to the front of chair 12 such that front flap 18 substantially covers 5 the surface of the front arm. In this position, side flaps 16 and front flap 18 prevent injury to the baby and also provide protection against germs that may be present on the side arms and the front arm of chair 12. Side flaps 16 and front flap 18 also prevent chair 12 from becoming dirty thereby making the job of wait staff at restaurants easier. Furthermore, because placemat 10 extends from table 25 to chair 12, food crumbs do not fall on the floor but instead fall in a trough 10 30 formed by placemat 10. Trough 30 may be made deeper by moving chair 12 closer to table 25. If placemat 10 comprises pocket 20, then pocket 20 hangs over the edge of table 25 with an opening 21 of pocket 20 extending along the edge of table 25 or in proximity to the edge. The food crumbs may be caught in the pocket thereby preventing the food crumbs from falling on the floor. Pocket 20 may also be used to store other things.

15 Placemat 10 provides a protective barrier between the child and his or her surroundings, specifically while the child is seated in a chair, such as those used in restaurants. The side and front flaps facilitate coupling of placemat 10 with chair 12 and also protect the child from the side arms and front arm of the chair with which the child would normally come in contact.

Placemat 10 may be folded in a manner such that the dirty or bottom surface 13 does not 20 touch the clean or upper surface 11 that faces the child. If desired, other articles, such as an unused diaper may be placed on placemat 10 before it is folded to eliminate the need to carry a diaper bag.

In an alternative embodiment, placemat 18 may comprise a seat liner (not shown). The seat protector may be releasably coupled to placemat 10.

While particular embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it will be apparent to those skilled in the pertinent art that changes and modifications may be made
5 without departing from the invention in its broader aspects.